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ABSTRACT

All entering freshmen at Bronx Community College (BCC), in New York, are required to enroll in an orientation/career development course which is taught by counselors and helps students with college procedures, curriculum choices, and occupational goals. To assess the college's career counseling services, a study was conducted to determine the extent that students were aware of the attributes employers seek in job applicants. The study also sought to reproduce a 1981 survey by Hafer and Hoth of 37 employers and 250 university students in Nebraska, to determine if the attitudes of employers recruiting at the largely minority BCC differed from the employers in the Hafer and Hoth survey. Thirty-two employers and 64 graduating students who participated in BCC's on-campus recruiting program during the spring and fall 1988 semesters were asked to rank the 13 most important items from a list of 26 job selection attributes identified in the 1981 survey. Results of the study included the following: (1) employers in both the BCC and the Hafer and Hoth survey ranked oral communication, motivation, and initiative as the top three attributes, while BCC students ranked them second, fourth, and ninth, respectively; (2) BCC students incorrectly perceived the value for employers of punctuality, ranking it first, while BCC employers ranked it seventh; and (3) BCC employers ranked work experience fifth and grades eleventh, placing more emphasis than employers in the 1981 study who ranked them twelfth and thirteenth, respectively. (MAB)

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The Attributes of Job Applicants: Employer Expectations Versus the Perceptions of Minority Students

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ATTRIBUTES OF JOB APPLICANTS: EMPLOYER VERSUS STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Frank P. Donnangelo
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INTRODUCTION

The influx of nontraditional, academically underprepared students has prompted many colleges and universities to establish special counseling programs to help such students survive academically and to cope with the emotional demands of college life. The City University of New York has maintained two such programs for over twenty years: Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) for its senior college students and College Discovery (CD) for its community college students.

As a unit of the City University, Bronx Community College (BCC) has mantained an open admissions policy since 1970. Typically, 90 to 95 percent of its students are members of minority groups, primarily Blacks and Hispanics. Approximately 65 percent of the student body is female. Entering freshmen have a mean age of approximately 26. Usually, 80 percent or more of the freshmen are required to take one or more remedial courses. About 10 percent of its students participate in the College Discovery Program.

The College's Department of Student Development, which includes the College Discovery Program, has attempted to meet the special counseling needs of its nontraditional, academically

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[1] This paper is based on Catherine Farley's Masters Thesis. See Farley, 1988.

underprepared students. Critical among those needs is career development, since these students may not have been exposed to career information and since community college students need to decide early in their lives what their majors will be. The research on employers' and students' beliefs about desirable attributes for job applicants reported here is part of a larger effort to provide students with specific guidance on how to choose and approach a career.

Career Development Courses and Workshops

All entering freshmen at Bronx Community College are required to register for a freshman orientation and career developement course (OCD-01) which is taught by counselors who also meet with the students individually for academic advisement as well as for career and personal counseling. College Discovery students register for special sections taught by counselors from the College Discovery Program.

Grade policies, graduation and curricula requirements, registration procedures, and student development support services are believed to be topics with which entering freshmen need more than surface familiarity if they are to make appropriate educational and career decisions. Therefore, they are included in the syllabus for the freshman orientation and career development course. In addition, students are given the opportunity to explore their values, interests, and abilities as they relate to curriculum choice and occupational goals and to explore the relationship between their course of study and

their career plans. Students are given written classroom and homework assignments from Orientation to College and Career Development: A Text (Santa Rita, 1980), the Bronx Community catalogue, and College Survival (Chapman, 1981).

In addition to the classroom sessions, students are required to attend at least four workshops chosen from a variety of workshops covering a multitude of topics. A number of them involve career planning activities or are intended to help students develop job hunting skills. They are presented by counselors from the Career Services Program.

After completing the freshman orientation and career development course, students may register for Career Development (OCD-12). The course, which is taught by counselors from the Career Services Program, is intended to give students an opportunity to explore further their values, interests, and abilities as they relate to curriculum choice and occupational goals. It also gives them an opportunity to develop job search strategies and to practice their job hunting skills, such as, interviewing.

Throughout their stay at BCC, students are given ample opportunities to meet with counselors to discuss their career plans. This is especially true for College Discovery students since they are assigned to counselors in the College Discovery Program with whom they meet regularly until graduation. The Career Services Program maintains an extensive on-campus recruiting program for graduating students which includes both individual and group meetings with counselors who help prepare the students for their employment interviews. In the group

meetings, referred to as Pre-Interview Workshops, students are assisted in the preparation of resumes, cover letters, and employment applications. They are also given an opportunity to practice their interviewing skills. The students participate in simulated interviews which are video-taped and discussed.

Donnangelo (1985) demonstrated that the College's freshman orientation and career development course has a statistically significant positive effect on the number of credits earned, the cumulative GPA, and the retention rate of entering freshmen during their first year of study. In addition, he conducted an evaluation of the counseling services of the Office of Employment Counseling and Placement during the 1979-1980 and 1980-81 academic years and found that a well-planned effort at improving and expanding employment counseling and placement services results in increased student satisfaction (Donnangelo, 1983).

Research on Preferred Attributes of Job Applicants

The present investigation is part of the Career Services Program and College Discovery's continuing efforts at improving career counseling services. Based upon a survey by Hafer and Hoth (1981), it attempts to determine to what extent students know what attributes employers actually look for in job applicants. With the exception of Hafer and Hoth and the present investigators, few researchers have attempted to answer this question in a systematic manner.

Hafer and Hoth (pp. 55-57) described their survey of 250 juniors and seniors in the College of Business Administration at

the University of Nebraska at Omaha (U of N). Their survey also included 37 national employers who hired students from the disciplines of marketing, management, and accounting.

Employers were asked to rank a list of 26 job selection attributes on a scale of 1 to 5 representing a range of "not important" to "very important." The resulting mean scores provided a prioritized ranking of the attributes. Students were given an identical list. They were asked to indicate how they thought employers would rank each attribute. The resulting sets of rankings from their survey are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Ranking of Job Selection Attributes
by Employers and Students

Attribute	Employer Ranking	Student Ranking
Oral Communication	1	1
Motivation	2	2
Initiative	3	8
Assertiveness	4	8
Loyalty	5	8
Leadership	6	10
Maturity	7	7
Enthusiasm	8	3
Punctuality	9	9
Appearance	10	4
Written Communication	11	6
Work Experience	12	5
Grades	13	14
Disposition	14	11
Extroversion	15	16
Mannerisms	16	13
Willingness to Relocate	17	12
School Reputation	18	18
Social Activities	19	20
Knowledge of Company	20	15
Community Involvement	21	19
Age	22	17
Sports Participation	23	24
Hobbies	24	21
Fraternal Organizations	25	23
Marital Status	26	22

Hafer and Hoth measured the degree of congruence between employer preferences and student perceptions. They concluded that if the results of their survey showed a distinct divergence of opinion, then students probably misperceive the characteristics employers seek in potential employees or are misinformed about them.

At Bronx Community College, the results of the Hafer and Hoth survey have been used as a guide in counseling students concerning employer expectations. As the College's on-campus recruiting program grew, the investigators began to wonder if, due to BCC's large minority student population, the expectations of the employers who regularly visit the BCC campus to interview graduating students might differ from those who participated in the Hafer and Hoth study. The recruiters who visit the BCC campus do so precisely because of the College's large minority and female population. They represent companies that have a genuine commitment to increasing the size and diversity of their minority and female work force. The investigators also wondered whether the perceptions of BCC students of employer expectations might differ from those of the students who participated in the Hafer and Hoth study due to different cultural experiences. Hence, the decision was made to undertake a similar study involving the College's graduating students who participate in its on-campus recruiting program and the employers who interview them.

METHOD

Thirty-two employers, each representing a different company or agency, who particiapted in BCC's on-campus recruiting program during the Spring, 1988 and Fall, 1988 semesters were asked to rank, from 1 to 13 (1 being the most important, 13 the least important) the upper 50 percent (N= 13) of the prioritized list of 26 job selection attributes identified in the Hafer and Hoth survey. Sixty-four graduating students who participated in the College's on-campus recruiting program during the Spring, 1988 and Fall, 1988 semesters were also asked to rank, from 1 to 13, how they thought the employers would rank the job selection attributes. Two of the 64 questionnaires were completed improperly and were, therefore, eliminated from the survey.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the employers were females whereas 44% of the students were females. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the employers were white, 35% black, and 29% Hispanic. Thirteen percent (13%) of the students were white, 39% black, 36% Hispanic, and 13% Asian. The racial backgrounds of the employers much more closely resembled those of the students than those of the general population. The employers represented a variety of companies and agencies ranging from local hospitals and the New York City Board of Education to federal agencies, such as, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service to multi-national corporations such as Eastman Kodak and IBM.

The methodology for the present study differs from that employed in the Hafer and Hoth study in three significant ways.

First, all of the student subjects at the University of Nebraska were accounting, marketing, or management majors whereas at BCC, in addition to accounting, marketing, and management majors, students with other majors, such as, electrical technology, medical laboratory technology, data processing, and secretarial studies were also included. Second, it is conceivable that none of the 250 student subjects in the Hafer and Hoth study was ever interviewed by any of the 37 employer representatives who participated in the survey whereas the 32 employers who participated in the BCC survey actually interviewed the 64 student participants. Third, the method of arriving at a rank order for the attributes in the present study differed from that in the Hafer and Hoth study. In the Hafer and Hoth study, high priority attributes were defined as those receiving a 4.0 employer rating or better on a 5.0 evaluation scale. Eleven of the 28 attributes listed in their questionnaire received a rating of 4.0 or higher. These 11 attributes were included in the BCC questionnaire with two additions, namely, work experience and grades which received employer ratings of 3.757 and 3.750 respectively. Since 11 of the 13 attributes included in the BCC questionnaire had already been identified in the Hafer and Hoth study as being of a high priority and work experience and grades came close to being identified as such, it was decided to have the subjects place the 13 attributes in rank order rather than having them rate each attribute on a 5.0 scale. By having the subjects place the attributes in rank order, the differing importance attached to each is magnified and, therefore, more easily discerned. The 32

rankings for each attribute were totalled. The attribute with the lowest total score was considered to have the highest ranking while the attribute with the highest total score was considered to have the lowest ranking.

RESULTS

The results of the BCC survey are presented in Table 2 along with comparisons with the Hafer and Hoth survey conducted at the University of Nebraska. In both surveys, the employers listed oral communication, motivation, and initiative as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most important job selection attributes whereas the BCC students ranked them 2nd, 4th, and 9th. These findings suggest that employers tend to value the same attributes in job applicants regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, BCC students tend to somewhat misperceive the importance employers attach to these three attributes. In addition, BCC students are far off base concerning the perceived value of punctuality. They

TABLE 2

Ranking of Job Selection Attributes
by Employers and Students

Attribute	Employers		Students	
	BCC	U of N	BCC	U of N
Oral Communication	1	1	2	1
Motivation	2	2	4	2
Initiative	3	3	9	8
Enthusiasm	4	8	8	3
Work Experience	5	12	3	5
Appearance	6	10	5	4
Punctuality	7	9	1	9
Maturity	8	7	6	7
Written Communication	9	11	13	6
Assertiveness	10	4	10	8
Grades	11	13	11	14
Leadership	12	6	12	10
Loyalty	13	5	7	8

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ranked it 1st while the BCC employers ranked it 7th and the U of N employers ranked it 9th. In the U of N survey, the employers ranked work experience and grades 12th and 13th and rated each less than 4.0 on a 5.0 evaluation scale indicating that, in their opinion, they are somewhat less than high ppriority attributes. The BCC employers, on the otherhand, ranked work experience 5th and grades 11th.

DISCUSSICN

Hafer and Hoth suggested that the results of their study serve as a guide for students in resume writing and selection of points to be emphasized during employment interviews. The fact that, in both surveys, employers listed oral communication, motivation, and initiative as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd most important job selection attributes underscores the value of the results of both the University of Nebraska and the Bronx Community College surveys, especially for minority students. It is important for them to know that employer expectations with respect to job selection attributes remain substantially the same for all students including cultural minorities. It is also interesting to note that employer expectations, in both surveys, remained substantially the same in spite of the fact that the students in the U of N survey were juniors and seniors while the BCC students were sophomorus.

Given the fact that the BCC employers ranked work experience 5th, it is certainly helpful that all BCC students have the opportunity to participate in the College's cooperative education program in order to obtain the related work experience employers

value highly. It seems ironic that employers who are considering minority students for employment should attach substantially more importance to work experience than other employers when minority students have fewer opportunities for related work experience.

The fact that the BCC employers ranked leadership and loyalty 12th and 13th probably is related to the fact that they were interviewing college sophomores for entry-level positions. Their major concern, therefore, tends to be students' ability to handle entry-level positions as demonstrated, for example, by their communication skills and work experience. They are less concerned with the students' long-range potential. Consequently, their leadership ability and loyalty are of less concern than they might be to employers interviewing college seniors for higher level positions.

The results of both surveys will be shared with BCC students, both individually and in groups, as well as in the freshman orientation and career development course (OCD-01) and the higher level career development course (OCD-12). This will be especially true for College Discovery students since they meet regularly with their counselors. Particular emphasis will be given to the results of the BCC survey. In this way, students will be better prepared for the employment interviews which will, in large part, determine their future careers.

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